

#216 ALLAN SANFORD: USS *WARD*

Steven Haller (SH): My name is Steven Haller, and I'm here with James P. Delgado, at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii. It's December 5, 1991, at about 5:25 PM. And we have the pleasure to be interviewing Mr. Allan Sanford. Mr. Sanford was a Seaman First Class on the USS *WARD*, at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Mr.[*Sanford*], Ward's gun fired what is in essence the first shot of World War II, and so it's a great pleasure to be able to be talking with you today. We're going to be doing this tape as a part of the National Park Service and *ARIZONA* Memorial's oral history program. We're doing it in conjunction with KHET-TV in Honolulu. So thanks again for being with us today, Mr. Sanford.

Allan Sanford: It's a pleasure to be here.

SH: Good. How did you get into the Navy?

AS: I joined the Naval reserve unit in St. Paul, Minnesota and with two others of my classmates in high school. And we enjoyed the meetings, and uniforms, and drills, and it was a nice social activity that was a little more mature than some of the high school activities that we had participated in. So we enjoyed the meetings of the St. Paul Naval reserve. And we called it also the Minnesota Naval Militia. However, in September 1940, the commanding officer of the unit came to the meeting and said, "Attention to orders, the Minnesota Naval Militia is hereby made part of the U.S. Navy. You've got two weeks to get your personal affairs in order. We're going overseas."

Well, fortunately, the orders were delayed until after Christmas 1940. So then in late December, before New Year's, the unit from St. Paul, Minnesota got on the train and we went down to San Diego, to the destroyer base, and we put the destroyer *WARD* back into commission. It was one of many destroyers that had been in mothballs at the destroyer base for quite some time, since World War I.

SH: Was the entire crew of the *WARD* made up of your unit, or did you have sort of a cadre of more experienced people?

AS: Okay, what they also did was they called out what they called the fleet reserve. And these were gentlemen who had completed twenty years service, some of them thirty years service. And they were pressed back into uniform and they came aboard, I think we had over 200 from the St. Paul naval reserve unit, and we had at least twenty of these fleet reservists, and then we also had certain key positions, by regular navy personnel. For example, the Yeoman in charge of the ship's office was regular Navy that was transferred on board there. And he also ran the gun director as a battle station.

SH: What were your usual duties aboard *WARD*?

AS: Well, I started out with being a seaman on the deck force and qualifying for Seaman First Class, which in those days, in peace time, was a difficult rank to achieve, which later on was probably equivalent to Coxswain's rank. And I was also an apprentice radioman. They called it a radio striker. So I would study the radio books and learn how to become a Radioman Third Class, and I would deliver the messages to the ship's officers when radio communications came in.

SH: Was that a wet ship, that boat?

AS: How do you mean?

SH: Did she ship a lot of water on rough seas?

AS: We were in a hurricane for nine days coming over from San Diego. Here you have a rather green crew. We were in this hurricane for nine days, when we got into Honolulu, and some of us got liberty. We took a taxi into the Army-Navy Y downtown, the "Y". And I walked across the street, I ordered a soda and the lady said, "You're from the USS *WARD*."

And I said, "How do you know?"

She said, "You're all that delicate shade of green." (Chuckles)

SH: So green crew had a . . .

AS: Green, no we were green from a hurricane. We lost all our food for nine days.

SH: What was your battle station?

AS: My battle station was hot shell man on gun number one, on the bow.

SH: What do you mean by hot shell man?

AS: Well, a hot shell man, I was issued mittens made out of asbestos. And I would catch the hot brass as it came out of the gun, after the gun was fired, and I was supposed to put it in a netting that would be rigged for me to throw the hot brass into. I was very unhappy that these mittens were not going to protect my forearms at all. So that was my job and we had gunfire training and towed targets during 1940, I mean '41 rather.

SH: Mm-hm.

AS: So our gun crews actually had good experience and we felt that we were well trained, and we could get targets at reasonable distances. So . . .

James Delgado: When you were in the *WARD*, did you have much emphasis in your training on looking for enemy submarines?

AS: Well, that was our job. The USS *WARD* was the guard ship, or part of Destroyer Division Eighty, which consisted of four old destroyers, the *WARD*, the *SHLEY*, the *ALLAN*, and the *CHEW*. The *CHEW* was a World War I split deck, four-stack tin can which was number sixty-six. And the *SHLY* and the *CHEW* were [DD]103 and [DD]106. I mean, [DD]102 and [DD]106. And we rotated duty guarding the entrance channel to Pearl Harbor. The regulations were that on all the charts of the world, was an indication that no submarine must approach Pearl Harbor within 100 miles, without coming to the surface and requesting a destroyer escort, on the surface, to approach any closer to Honolulu or Pearl Harbor.

So on the week that we were not the channel guard, we would be on duty escorting submarines into Pearl Harbor, our own submarines, or any other, if they were British or whatever. And then a week we'd have maybe liberty in Honolulu pretty good.

JD: As tensions increased in the world in late 1941, was there any increase in the frequency of your training?

AS: We did have quite a bit of training on board and the captain was satisfied that we had a well-trained crew.

JD: What kind of a fellow was [*Lieutenant*]Commander Outerbridge?

AS: Well, I didn't know him very well because he had just come aboard. He just relieved the existing captain, so nobody really knew much about him. It was rumored that he was an academy man, for one thing. And we expected a lot of him. And I think he did very well. I believe that myself and the other crew members gave the captain great credit for making a decision to fire.

The *ARIZONA* was -- not the *ARIZONA* -- the *ANTARES* supply ship was coming into Pearl Harbor at 0645, a little before that, and towing a barge [*HDS-2*]. And between the *ARIZONA* and the barge, this little two-man sub was trying to sneak into the harbor. And it had been spotted before in the area, and we were called to general quarters and they lost track of it. Okay, it's so small, you can't blame the sonar man for losing it in the waves, near the surface and that. But I think we were called to general quarters, oh, something like 0300 or 0400 in the morning. Anyway, see, it was pretty way early in the morning. And then we were secured from general quarters, and then when general quarters went again, we were on our way, full speed ahead to attack the submarine. And as I understood it, the captain said, "All ahead flank, stand by to ram. Commence firing."

SH: Did you actually see the sub?

AS: Oh yes. (Chuckles) The --- when we . . .

SH: What did it look like?

AS: . . . fired at the sub . . .

SH: What did it look like to you?

AS: . . . it was 100 yards away. And when gun number three fired at it and hit it, it was only fifty yards away. But the foscle of the ship was rolling and pitching, and the shells that the crewmen were loading, ready to load into the gun weighed over seventy-five pounds. And here you are, staggering all over that rolling, pitching deck with live ammunition with graze fuses on the nose, and you're kind of afraid of that kind of ammunition. Anyway, we fired and you could watch down the end of the barrel, and you could see that the projectile just barely missed the sub. I thought if it had another coat of paint on the sub, it might have activated the graze fuse. That's how close I think we came.

The gun number three hit at the base of the conning tower and I'm sure it killed the Japanese commander of that sub.

SH: And what did the sub look like to you, as it went . . .

AS: It looked like a fifty-gallon oil drum on top of maybe three or four of 'em that were laid down below it, with a broomstick sticking up. And of course, that broomstick was the periscope. And I'm sure that the men on the bridge could tell that there was something like your prism so that at the top of this broomstick, they could see the periscope, but it was too far away for us to know that it was anything like that. We thought it might have been a toy or who knows. We never heard of or seen of anything like a two-man submarine before. But as I said, I give the captain great credit for making a decision to fire, because it did start World War II.

JD: What were you doing when the second general quarters was sounded, that brought you to the station . . .

AS: Probably getting ready for breakfast. Mm-hm. I might have still been in my bunk.

SH: Where was your bunk?

AS: Just getting out . . .

SH: Was it aft, or . . .

AS: Pardon?

SH: Where was your bunk?

AS: My bunk was under the bridge.

SH: Under the bridge, okay.

AS: Under the main deck, but below the bridge there.

JD: When you came to station and you were about 100 yards off, could you just go through, if you can remember, what transpired with any of the guys? Was it a regular drill or was there a much different discussion of talking about what you were going to see, or what you saw? Much excitement?

AS: Well, we had been on this, in shore patrol, okay, and the sonar man had been looking for, listening for screws, for a submarine. We had often times been called to general quarters when the sonar man believed that he heard screws. The captain backed up the sonar man all the time. The sonarman heard screws, we went to general quarters, and it was our responsibility and we knew to sink any sub that was attempting to reach Pearl Harbor submerged. We were a little surprised to find a submarine that close on the surface. So we knew that it wasn't supposed to be there. I think my impression was that perhaps the submarine might have been one single reconnaissance effort. I had no concept at all that it was going to be followed up with a major combat, 'til I saw the planes coming, which was an hour and twenty minutes later.

SH: Do you recall any words that you or any of your gun crew mates had said at the time while you were, before or after firing?

AS: Oh, we didn't know what it was. We thought it was very, very small for a submarine. I don't believe we thought it had torpedoes on it. We thought maybe it was just coming around for a look-see. Maybe it was just an observer. We found out later that it not only had two torpedoes, but it also had a 500 pound detonation charge in the stern, and that the skipper of that sub was supposed to come along side another ship and pull himself up along with the other ship, that he was along side. So when I heard about that later on, I was kind of worried because the captain had said, "Stand by to ram." He'd made up his mind that he was going to get that submarine, one way or another. It was not going to get through.

SH: Did you see any of the other subs after the attack, the one that was rammed and then raised, the one that was captured?

AS: I saw one at the Pearl Harbor submarine base. It evidently had run on the beach. And I had a much better impression because what was above the surface of the water was very little compared to what I saw ashore. All you could really see in the water was the little conning tower, which wasn't much bigger than a fifty-gallon oil drum, and maybe twenty feet on either side of the conning tower, of a thickness that was only one or two feet high above the water. So that's what it looked like.

SH: We left the chain of events, I think, when the number three gun fired and hit the submarine, and . . .

AS: Oh, then . . .

SH: . . . the destroyer rushed by.

AS: Then we kicked over depth charges and blew it out of the water. And there was an oil -- I don't know why there should have been an oil slick. I understood that submarine was electric. But anyway, the people that were looking at it and checking for it thought that they saw an oil slick.

SH: How about you? What did you see at that time? Or did you see?

AS: I was back in the --- after they secured from general quarters, I went back to the radio room, just to see what was going on in terms of communications and that. And as I recall it, Pearl Harbor sent back a message to the captain, "Are you sure? Please verify."

And captain was highly perturbed. He said that we had sunk with gun, we had attacked with gunfire and depth charges a submarine intruding into Pearl Harbor defensive sea frontier, defensive waters. So I understood that in the --- all of Pearl Harbor, they also had radio receivers on most of the bridges on the ships in the harbor, to have a voice circuit. They called it a TBS [talk between ships] circuit. What it stands for, I forget. But they, all the ships were supposed to monitor that frequency, and they had the opportunity to know that the *WARD* had sunk or attacked a submarine at the Pearl Harbor entrance. If only they had unlocked the ammunition on the guns, at that time.

JD: How did you feel, having been on the crew that had just fired on this sub, and then being in the radio room, having Pearl Harbor ask for confirmation, and then having all that time pass with apparently no response?

AS: Well, we sent back the message that we had sunk it and I was not aware that there was any other communication, but the captain might have been talking on the TBS circuit, on the bridge. And I wasn't monitoring that.

JD: And then suddenly you saw planes?

AS: Hoo. Yeah, I saw those red balls on those planes. I figured they had no other target in the world but me. I can't say I was afraid, I was terrified. But one good thing about strict training is that you do your job, and your personal security is in being well-trained and doing your job well, and everybody around you depends on you to do your job. So that's what everybody did.

JD: While the attack was happening, what did WARD and what did you do all morning?

AS: We had anti-aircraft gun behind the gun that I was on, that was a three-inch gun and that was firing away at the planes, and we had fifty-caliber machine guns on the bridge of the wings, wings of the bridge, and they were firing. And meanwhile, we were also checking for submarines in the area and very diligently looking for submarines. Also, there was a sampan that intruded into the restricted area, and we had to stop the sampan and call the Coast Guard, and get them to escort it back to Pearl Harbor. What that sampan was doing in that area, I have never found out. I'd like to know.

JD: Was there much discussion with this sampan, among the others about them possibly working for the Japanese?

AS: Well, that was what was suspected.

JD: Did you talk much about it at the time amongst yourselves?

AS: We just speculated what could it be and we knew that it didn't belong there. And generally speaking, we had never before had trouble with local ships intruding in the area when they're not supposed to be there. See, your sea charts show an outline specifically the restricted area and generally speaking, they all tried to stay out of that area. Of course, there's good fishing. (Laughs) So they liked to get as close as they can. Yeah.

SH: What's your most vivid memory of that day, and can you sort of paint a mental picture of that, a picture of words of that?

AS: Well, I think the thing that terrified me the most was all the planes. They were firing at people in the water. And then we had to go into West Loch, which is where the ammunition was all stored, and we had to reload, take on board some more ammunition. And I didn't like the idea of being in the ammunition storage area (chuckles) under those circumstances, so we got in there, we loaded up and got out.

SH: We were just talking to a fellow . . .

AS: And I heard . . .

SH: . . . from *PYRO*.

AS: Oh, the *PYRO* was across from where we went. I saw that *PYRO* over there and I didn't want to be very close to that ship at all. But later duty I had -- my bunk was on an aircraft carrier with bombs under me, aviation gasoline on this other wall and torpedoes on the bulkhead above me. So you learn to live with it.

SH: Just for the sake of the record, why don't you name that ship?

AS: Oh, that was the *CORE*. It was an escort carrier, number thirteen. So I left the *WARD* about six months after the December 7 attack.

JD: Did you have any friends on any of the other ships that didn't come through?

AS: Well, you mean that were hurt in the attack? Not that I know of. Not a person I know of.

SH: When, you said you went to West Loch, I guess, first when you . . .

AS: That's where the ammunition was all stored.

SH: The first time *WARD* went by the Battleship Row, what was your reaction?

AS: Devastated, absolutely devastated. It --- well, there was a smell about bodies that you'll never forget as long as you live. The bodies in the water that were bloated. (Sighs) That's quite a memory. And also when we went by the *OKLAHOMA*, that was turned over, and we knew that there were people inside there. And wow, it was very disheartening. To see all those battleships and knowing that we'd been under attack, and supposedly the major backbone of the U.S. Navy was gone. And made us believe that it was going to be a very long war. So everybody was very, very sad at that time. The fact that we'd be in a long war, the fact there'd been a lot of people killed. And everything just wasn't going to be the same for years. Most of us were only eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old.

SH: Looking back some years later, you said things have never been the same. How did your experiences at Pearl Harbor or the war in general change you? Or did it change you in particular?

AS: Well, I thought it was going to be a long war, so when I had a chance to apply for officer's training and get some college training, I did. And it was all right. So I think it gave me an incentive to study harder, improve myself and so on. Also I guess I gave a lot of patriotic fervor to my son and my grandson, because my son went to the Naval Academy, and he's now executive officer of a battle cruiser. And my grandson has got a qualification certificate from Annapolis. He's fully qualified for an appointment. And my son's grandfather was a gunner's mate in World War I. So they all come from the tradition. And I guess my son and my grandson are keeping up the good work. I firmly believe that the military forces are the peacekeepers. And the only reason the United States goes to war is to prevent wars. So I'm pretty in favor for my son and my grandson carrying on the work.

JD: What in particular made you want to come to the Fiftieth Anniversary?

AS: Well, I had moved to Florida, where I had worked at the Canaveral Air Force Station, and I hadn't seen my ship mates for fifty years. So I already met two of 'em. I didn't recognize 'em at all. They were only eighteen at the time, and now they're in their sixties, close to seventy. So, entirely different. The reason I came was to see my shipmates. Any more questions?

SH: Well, Mr. Sanford, it's obvious you're proud of your family and its naval tradition, and I think it's pretty clear they have some good reason to be proud of you too. I'd like to thank you very much for the time that you've taken to be with us today and share those very vivid memories. We appreciate it very much.

AS: I've enjoyed it very much.

SH: Thank you, sir.

AS: You're welcome. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW